

11A. Prose Description of Site:

INTRODUCTION

The most extensive natural lands in mainland Dare County are located along its southern border. These lands extend from the marshes of Pamlico Sound westward to the swamp forests of the Alligator River, and represent several major vegetation types. From this immense tract along the county line, three contiguous but distinctive wetland natural areas have been selected, recognized on the basis of their distinctively different vegetation types which ultimately originate with differences in soils, hydrology, fire and the local and regional history of human-caused disturbances. Of these natural areas the Faircloth Road Pond Pine Stand and the US 264 Low Pocosin are described on pp. 49 and pp. 69 respectively. The Alligator River Swamp Forest natural area is described in the pages of the following site report.

The Alligator River natural area, about 22,300 acres in size, is located due west of the Air Force Bombing Range and is centered around Maple Road and the Whipping Creek drainage. The natural area is bounded on the south by the Dare/Hyde County line; on the west by the Alligator River; on the north by short segments of Alligator Road, Navy Lead Road, and a line drawn to Beechland Road where Jackson Road enters; and on the east by the Faircloth Road Pond Pine natural area and cleared portions of the bombing range.

The Alligator River swamp forests, together with certain other vegetation types which are included in the natural area, comprise the most extensive and varied of the three sub-units of the county line tract. Due to its valuable timber resources the natural area in recent times has been the recipient of somewhat more extensive ecological disturbance than the two county line natural areas to the east. The thin network of roads and accompanying canals which penetrates the southern portion of Dare County is concentrated in the Alligator River natural area, and considerable logging activity has been carried out in swamp forest stands along these roads. Additional canals and roads have been constructed into most of the pure Atlantic white cedar (Chamaecyparis thyoides) stands in the natural area, and many of these stands have been cut during the past ten years. The logging of swamp forest timber continues today.

Soils of the natural area are primarily deep Histosols. The most extensive soil mapping unit is the Pungo soil series, classified as dysic, thermic Typic Medisaprists (all field soils mapping data from Barnes, 1981). This mapping unit is understood to include large areas of the Dare series, carrying an identical classification and separated from Pungo soils based on texture of underlying mineral strata (Barnes, pers. comm., 1982). The Pungo series forms two main bodies in the natural area: one along the Alligator River in a north-south trending band ranging